

## **Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Preservation Project**

### **Summary of Community Input from Informational Sessions & Participant Questionnaires**

*Approximately 180 individuals attended 8 informational sessions across Charleston and Berkeley counties and provided additional feedback and information through participant questionnaires. The below statements, though consolidated and paraphrased by common themes, reflect a diversity of voices and unique individual perspectives. It should not be interpreted that all individuals who participated in this stage of the project agree on all statements and priorities.*

#### **Telling Our Own Story**

*“Gullah Geechee people have always been creating freedom.”*

- The way history has been presented is negative (slavery). There is life after slavery. We need more inspiring history that youth can be a part of. Our history is resistance, overcoming. We need to uplift the celebratory aspects.
- We haven't been telling our own stories, we are left out. We need to tell our stories.
- We don't want to be a museum. Let's uplift survival history.

#### **With our history, we can...**

- Educate and raise awareness
  - ...document it so our younger generation knows
  - ...know where we come from to know where we're going.
  - ...increase sense of ownership and overcome apathy
  - ...overcome systematic oppression of black history
- ...revive and validate (cultural) identity, reclaim culture and language, pride
- ...promote cultural diversity
- ...preserve knowledge and history
  - ...interpretation, explain what happened here
- ...gain advocacy and policy support
- ...empower our community
- ...grow our economy (cultural heritage tourism)

#### **What we have already been working on**

- Addressing heirs property issues
- Advocating for protections against new development
- Researching and documenting community history
- Collecting oral histories
- Creating community archives, digitizing photos and obituaries

- Establishing and/or strengthening neighborhood associations and community groups for restoration and preservation
- Creating websites and other platforms to share history

### **Types of historic and cultural resources we would like to preserve and restore**

- Our communities established by freed black people
- Sweetgrass basket stands and makers
- Historic schools (Rosenwald, equalization, others)
- Historic churches and other spiritual buildings/places
- Community centers and clubs
- Cemeteries and burial grounds
- Natural resources (historic ecosystems)

### **What assistance would be most valuable from this project**

#### *Research & Documentation:*

- Trainings on how to document and communicate community history
- Learn about/find the history of our community
- Collect and/or organize oral histories
- Create community archives, digitize archives
- Inventory of historic resources

#### *Recognition:*

- Erect historical markers
- Gain recognition for historic schools, churches and community centers
- Pursue historic district designation
- Make it easier to find and connect with community history
- National Register nomination
- Interpretive trail

#### *Preservation & Sustainability:*

- Protect and preserve cemeteries/burial grounds
- Pursue opportunities for direct funding
- Community-building activities and events
- Pursue protections from development pressures using historic designation as a tool
- Legal support for land conservation and natural resource preservation

### **Our priorities and concerns going forward**

- This project can be a foundation for data, information and opportunities
- We know what we want to do, we just need more “manpower” and time. We know our community has a rich history, but there is more to learn. We’ve heard the stories, we need to record them.
- Sustainability is critical.
  - Policy/Advocacy

- Help develop funding plans & strategies
- Training, support, commitment
- Directory of program options
- Community archives/shared authority
- Investing in youth to lead this work in the future
  - Internships for Black youth to shadow/apprentice in surveying/archival collections.
  - Partnerships with groups/orgs already working with kids/youth
- Whose expertise do we value?
  - Direct compensation for those telling the stories, documenting the history
- Find/share examples of what other communities are doing
- Finding creative ways to share the history
  - Incorporate social media and games
  - Learning about Gullah Geechee culture through art
  - Talk to teachers, educational programs
  - Community day and capture oral histories
  - Museum exhibits
  - Documentary films
  - Community celebrations and festivals
  - Cultural workshops/genealogy workshops
  - Examples: Pen Center Heritage Days Celebration, Gullah Festival, Gullah Geechee Culture and Nature Festival, Mcleod Plantation Historic Site, Daughter of the Dust

**Questions we would like to be addressed through this project**

- What is meant by “community”?
- There are feelings of isolation and being left out. How can fair resource allocation address this?
- What are the implications of historic designation?
- How can this project support the other goals/definition of “preservation?”
  - Preservation of people (ex: water, sewer, heirs property)
  - More education about options for protections (e.g. Pinckney’s bill)
  - Protection against development pressures
  - Land conservation
  - Importance of natural and cultural resources

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